DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 342 457 JC 920 145

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TITLE Effective Teaching in the Multi-Cultural Classroom.
PUB DATE 18 Nov 90
NOTE 14p.; Report of a panel presentation for the Community College League of California (Los Angeles, CA, November 18, 1990).
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Classroom Communication; Communication Skills; Community Colleges; Cultural Awareness; Cultural Differences; Instructional Effectiveness; Instructional Innovation; *Multicultural Education; Student Evaluation of Teacher Performance; *Teacher Behavior; Teacher Effectiveness; *Teacher Student Relationship; Two Year Colleges
IDENTIFIERS *Immediacy

ABSTRACT

Community college instructors and administrators need to understand teacher immediacy research and the role of immediacy in the multi-cultural classroom. Immediacy can be viewed as a combination of nonverbal behaviors used to accentuate a verbal message and reduce physical and psychological distance between interactants. Janis Andersen's research demonstrated that half of the variance in student attitudes toward an instructor relates to student perceptions of teacher immediacy. Increasing eye contact and addressing the student in a face-to-face interaction can also help increase positive attitudes. Immediacy can be misinterpreted, especially if teachers use too much immediacy too quickly, thereby creating an avoidance response, or if teachers single out only some students for immediacy. Students' perceptions of a teacher's immediacy behavior will vary according to their cultural background. A series of studies by Collier and Powell focused on the influence of culture on perceptions of teacher effectiveness. Using samples of Black-American, Latino, Asian-American, and Anglo students, the researchers found that all groups described teacher immediacy as important. Anglo students most liked teachers who seemed approachable and friendly. Latinos saw effective teachers as those who were warm and supportive. Black Americans liked instructors who were more dramatic in style and who helped to motivate their students. Asian Americans preferred teachers who modeled the types of behavior expected from their students in public speaking. They also found that immediacy served different functions for students from different ethnic backgrounds at different times during the course. (JSP)

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"EFFECTIVE TEACHING IN THE MULTI-CULTURAL CLASSROOM"

A Report of a Panel Presentation for the
Community College League of California
November 18, 1990 - Los Angeles, California

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The authors wish to thank Wendy Lai of Rio Hondo College for her work on the presentation.

JC920145

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With today's ethnically and culturally diverse classrooms the ability for teachers to adapt to students from different cultural backgrounds is important. Behaviors which represent teaching effectiveness vary from one culture to another. One teacher behavior that appears to be central to effective teaching is immediacy. This paper is by no means a complete literature review of teacher immediacy but rather it serves as a report of a panel presentation given primarily to community college instructors and administrators. Its purpose was to introduce them to teacher immediacy research and the role of immediacy in the multi-cultural classroom.

According to Clifford Geertz (1973), "Cultures are composed of shared background variables such as history and heritage and behavior patterns, which together form the meanings or significance assigned to everyday behavior". Culture has a dramatic effect on the communication process. As we all know the Ethnic composition of today's classrooms are changing. Banks (1987) defined ethnicity as a group with a shared culture, who has origins outside or preceding the creation of the nation state in which members of the group currently reside, and whose members are aware of and emphasize their heritage. It is not uncommon to find student's from a variety of ethnic background in today's community college classrooms. According to the Chronicle of Higher Education (1990), Pasadena City College ranked fourth for enrollment of Asian

students, eighth for Hispanic students, eleventh for Black students, and first for foreign students overall in all of California's community college. It is obvious then that the multi-cultural classroom provides a real challenge for teachers. A teacher has to learn to adapt to the multi-cultural classroom. One teacher behavior which has been studied in terms of its impact on students from different cultural and ethnic backgrounds is immediacy.

Mehrabian (1969) defined immediacy as behaviors which reduce physical and psychological distance between interactants. In his book, Silent Messages, Mehrabian addresses how immediacy is linked to liking. he believes that immediacy behaviors signal accessibility, involvement and interest. Greater liking is conveyed by standing close instead of far, leaning forward instead of back while seated, touching and having eye contact.

Janis Andersen's research (1979) focussed on the impact of immediacy and the instructional context. Shew as one of the first to examine immediacy and the instructional context. Andersen's (1979) research demonstrated that "fifty percent of the variance in student attitudes toward the instructor can be accounted for by student perceptions of teacher immediacy." In other words, how a student feels towards an instructor is closely related to the immediacy behaviors demonstrated by the teacher.

An example of reducing physical distance is an instructor moving in front of the class without the desk or podium between

him/herself and students. By moving away from the podium or in front of the desk when presenting information, the instructor literally opens a direct line of communication among students and instructor. As Andersen (1979) explains, people who are physically close experience "greater visual, tactual, auditory, and olfactory information." Reducing distance also occurs by increasing available message mediums and utilizing these channels of communication to get the message across.

By increasing eye contact and addressing the student in a face to face interaction can also help increase positive attitudes, hence, reduce psychological distance which might exist between student and instructor. Psychological distance is reduced when positive affect or liking develops. Students begin to reduce psychological distance by "getting to know" the instructor. Student perceptions are usually affirmed or negated based on instructor behavior. As Andersen (1979) stresses, "When a person communicated through words, facial expression, tone of voice, head movements, and direct eye contact, there is greater immediacy than when a person communicates only through words and body movement."

It is important to note that the use of nonverbal behaviors should be observed along with the verbal message. Even though "actions speak louder than words," it is best to interpret nonverbal behaviors in relation to the verbal statements expressed.

An instrument used in measuring Immediacy Behaviors is the Behavioral Indicates of Immediacy Scale (BII SCALE see Appendix I). "The BII is a 15-item, five-step, Likert-type scale generated

directly from the immediacy construct (Andersen 1979)." In Andersen's study, students were asked to respond to two scales {BII and GI scales, for a further explanation of the procedures we recommend you read Andersen's 1979 article} and indicate how they perceived their instructor in the teaching role. The response was indicated from 1-7, (1) strongly disagree through (7) strongly agree (see scale). Andersen (1979) states, "The instrument operationalizes immediacy as those communication behaviors manifested and perceived when a person maintains closer physical distance, uses body orientation, is relaxed, uses overall purposeful body movement, gestures, engaged in positive head nods, smiles, uses eye contact, and is vocally expressive."

Andersen's (1979) research found that students were just as reliable as "trained objective observers" in assessing immediacy behaviors. Along with extending immediacy theory into the classroom, Andersen's (1979) research set forth a measurement for the pursuit of studying immediacy as a "reliable holistic concept." Immediacy can be viewed as a combination of nonverbal behaviors used to accentuate the verbal message.

The results and impact of immediacy behaviors have a direct impact on affective learning and other teacher effectiveness concepts. This continuing process of encouragement and persistence of addressing student and teacher attitudes, values, and beliefs holds a major key to motivation for building a positive learning environment.

Because there is a strong liking and immediacy behaviors, it is

important each instructor have a clear understanding of the immediacy construct.

Andersen, P. and Andersen, J. (1982), offer some words of caution when understanding one's immediacy level. Immediacy does not equate with the term intimacy. "The term intimacy has connotations of extreme interpersonal warmth and closeness." Intimacy is usually formed after individuals associated their relationship as trusting and well-established beyond the initial acquaintance stage.

Instructors should be careful in the use of immediacy behaviors they employ. Some behaviors such as touch can often be "misinterpreted as intimate or sexual behavior." the Andersens (1982) stress, "Misinterpretations will also be less likely if immediacy behaviors are part of the teacher's interaction pattern with everyone in the classroom....Being immediate only to opposite-sex students for to a teacher's favorite students can lead to misinterpretations of intimacy and should be avoided."

Another concern is if students attitudes about the instructor is positive or neutral then the teachers immediacy cues will probably be perceived as positive. The Andersens (1982) state, "The use of immediacy cues by a teacher who is perceived negatively by students may produce an equilibrium or avoidance response; thus actually increasing the psychological distance between teachers and students."

If an instructor notices that students are "turning away, backing up, reducing eye contact, the teacher is premature in

establishing such a high level of immediacy", warns the Andersens (1982). Therefore, each instructor should present those immediacy behaviors which they feel most comfortable with, without leading in misinterpretation. Once an instructor feels comfortable in recognizing the use of immediacy behaviors they employ, they may then be able to analyze which behaviors are most effective for their classroom environment and instructional goals.

Although an instructor uses immediacy behaviors, students' perceptions of the types of immediacy behaviors will differ based on their cultural background as found in the research of Collier and Powell.

Since cultural/ethnic differences influence one's beliefs, attitudes, and values, it would seem most probably that perceptions of education, instructional contexts, and perceptions of what constitutes an effective teacher would also be influenced. Research by Collier and Powell (1986) examined "the role of culture\ethnicity in influencing judgements of teacher communication."

In order to understand the multi-cultural classroom and student perceptions, the statements of four cultural groups of students were analyzed for what constitutes an effective teacher. Each student responded to an immediacy scale which indicated the immediate behaviors viewed as effective from their cultural/ethnic perspective.

Collier and Powell (1986) wanted to compare "the ethnic students' perceptions of their Anglo instructors" with those of

Anglo students' perceptions. The researchers suggest that the "characterizations of effective teaching, then, may have a cultural bias."

The four groups identified in the study were: Black-Americans, Latinos, Asian-Americans, and Anglos. Because these four culture groups have presented "different preferences for relationally appropriate and effective behaviors in contexts other than instruction," Collier and Powell (1986) suggest that "different preferences" would most likely exist in the classroom context.

The purpose and research findings of this study are quite informative and useful for teacher knowledge of student beliefs, attitudes, and values about education and more importantly perceptions of teacher behavior based on cultural perspectives beyond a traditional Anglo viewpoint. As stated by Collier and Powell (1986), the purpose of the study was "to question the degree to which our notions of effective teaching can be extended to multicultural classrooms."

The study was based on a Public Speaking classroom environment, hence, the researchers suggest that the construct of teacher immediacy "may play a significant role in calming the anxiety and apprehension of the Asian students in the public speaking context and enabling them to save face."

Because the use of immediacy behaviors are important in setting up a supportive and non-threatening classroom environment, what behaviors students found effective in "setting the tone" were

of extreme interest to the researchers. As Collier and Powell (1986) state, "Teacher immediacy may facilitate student understanding of the way in which the concepts of public speaking are put into action.

Because communication is greatly influenced by cultural orientation, the researchers provide a brief overview of some of the differences and extended their research in examining perceptions of course utility.

Powell and Collier's (1987) second study on student culture/ethnicity in influencing judgements of teacher communication and perceptions of course utility is a replication and extension of their 1986 study. The same four ethnic groups were examined: Black-Americans, Latinos, Asian-Americans, and Anglos. They predicted that students from each of these ethnic groups would find teacher immediacy and teaching effectiveness to be positively related. All culture groups described teacher immediacy and effectiveness as important as the authors hypothesized. However, particularly relevant to Powell and Collier's (1987) second study on teacher immediacy is that differences emerged in the particular behaviors described by each of the ethnic groups. Anglo students appeared to like instructors who are approachable and friendly. Specifically, Anglo like instructors who smile, and gesture appropriately. Latino students like teachers who are relational in nature. Powell and Collier's (1987) qualitative data indicated that Latino view effective teachers as those who are warm and supportive. Black Americans

were found to like instructors who were more dramatic with their teaching and help to motivate their students. Asians were found to be motivated by teachers who shoed them the types of behaviors they were being asked to preform as students in a public speaking course.

In Collier an Powell's (1988) third study on ethnicity and teacher immediacy they sought to "determine if the structural relationships among teacher immediacy, teacher effectiveness, and course utility changed for students from different ethnic groups. They caution us because of their relatively small sample size but state that there are apparent differences for each group studied. Collier and Powell (1988) found that "immediacy serves different functions for students from different ethnic backgrounds at different times in the course". Anglo-Americans were found to view the course at less useful toward the end of the term, and immediacy and effectiveness appeared to be strongly related throughout the course. For Latinos, immediacy was found to be important early in the course. For Black-Americans their views early on in the course appeared to have an impact on their later judgements. Asian-Americans consistent relationships emerged between immediacy and effectiveness.

Teachers are the decisive element in the classroom. What we do creates the classroom climate and a good teacher learns to adapt to the environment. Our purpose today was to introduce you to teacher immediacy and its role in the multi-cultural classroom. We suggest that you incorporate immediacy behaviors which you feel

most comfortable with in your classroom and to read the research presented to you today in order for you to better understand teacher immediacy.

Appendix I

Behavioral Indicants of Immediacy Scale (BIII)

Please mark these scales to indicate how you perceive your instructor in the teaching role. Please mark the following statements to indicate whether you: (7) strongly agree; (6) agree; (5) moderately agree; (4) are undecided; (3) moderately disagree; (2) disagree; or (1) strongly disagree. Please record the number of your response in the space provided beside each statement. There is no correct answer. Simply record your perceptions. Some of the questions may seem similar, but this is necessary.

_____ 1. This instructor engages in more eye contact with me when teaching than most other instructors.

_____ 2. This instructor has a more tense body position while teaching than most other instructors.

_____ 3. This instructor gestures more while teaching than most other instructors.

_____ 4. This instructor engages in less movement while teaching than most other instructors.

_____ 5. This instructor has a more relaxed body position while teaching than most other instructors.

_____ 6. This instructor directs his/her body position more toward students while teaching than most other instructors.

_____ 7. This instructor smiles more during class than most other instructors.

_____ 8. This instructor engages in less eye contact with me when teaching than most other instructors.

_____ 9. This instructor is more vocally expressive while teaching than most other instructors.

_____ 10. This instructor is more distant from students while teaching than most other instructors.

_____ 11. This instructor directs his/her body position less toward students while teaching than most other instructors.

_____ 12. This instructor gestures less while teaching than most other instructors.

_____ 13. This instructor engages in more movement while teaching than most other instructors.

_____ 14. This instructor is less vocally expressive while teaching than most other instructors.

_____ 15. This instructor smiles less during class than most other instructors.

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